

Dear Judge Morrison,

My name is Thomas Monroe DeVelin. I was born on September 19, 1997, in Chillicothe, Ohio. I spent my childhood and teenage years in Waverly, Ohio. I lived a happy and content childhood. I never had any needs that couldn't be fulfilled by my family. Overall, my early years were healthy, safe and constructive.

I attended Bishop Flaget School, a Catholic grade school, from Kindergarten through 5th grade. I attended Waverly City schools from 6th grade through 12th grade, graduating from Waverly High School in Spring of 2016. I participated in several extra-curricular activities, including Cross-Country, Tennis, Soccer, and Marching, Concert, and Jazz bands. During my last two years in high school, I was responsible for running the Audio-Visual stage crews in the auditorium.

I joined Cub Scouts at the beginning of 1st grade, and went on to earn the rank of Eagle Scout. In our Boy Scout Troop, I was elected Senior Patrol Leader, and also elected to the Order of the Arrow.

On October, 28, 2014, at the age of 17, I enlisted in the Ohio Army National Guard. I had wanted to serve in the military since the age of 7. I attended Army Basic Combat Training between my Junior and Senior years at Fort Jackson, SC. After graduating high school, I attended Army Advanced Individual Training (AIT) at Fort Sill, OK, and became certified as an Air Defense Battle Management System Operator. In this position, I was responsible for operating and maintaining air defense radar and weaponry capable of intercepting incoming aircraft, rockets, artillery, and mortars.

Following AIT, I prepared for a deployment to Afghanistan. Preparation consisted of several training assignments to bases around the country. I deployed to Bagram Airbase, Afghanistan, from July 1, 2017, to March 11, 2018. The airbase received some incoming fire from the Taliban, several rocket or mortar attacks per week. On one occasion, shrapnel hit the roof of my quarters, but fortunately none penetrated. On another occasion a suicide bomber blew himself up at one of the entry points, killing an interpreter and severely wounding several American Soldiers. I'll never forget the PA announcement asking for blood donors during that incident.

Six months after returning from Afghanistan, I deployed to Washington, DC, to provide air defense coverage over our nation's capital. I volunteered for this assignment and was assigned to a different battalion. There were a few soldiers from my time in Afghanistan on this deployment, but most were from the new battalion. This deployment went from September 27, 2018, until August 10, 2019. My family was able to visit me while on this assignment.

After returning from Washington, I moved in with my parents, and got a job working in Security for Abercrombie & Fitch. I had wanted to move to Columbus, but could not afford to at this time. So I started driving for UBER to make some extra money, and become familiar with the Columbus area. I worked for Abercrombie & Fitch from October 14, 2019, to January 6, 2020.

In Mid-February, 2020, I started taking online classes to earn IT certifications. At this time, I moved to Chesapeake, Ohio, and shared a house with a friend from the National Guard. He was having trouble meeting his rent, and we figured we could cover it between the two of us. I continued to drive for UBER during the initial COVID-19 panic.

On May 29, 2020, my National Guard unit was activated to participate in metropolitan riot control in response to the nationwide protests following the death of George Floyd. Fortunately, our unit was assigned a back-up role, and was not called into service. This assignment lasted about two weeks.

In mid-June, 2020, I moved to Columbus. I had made enough money driving for UBER to afford this move, and my roommate in Chesapeake had saved enough to allow him to finish paying his lease by himself. Shortly after moving to Columbus, I got a contract job working at Beightler Armory, the headquarters detachment for the Ohio Army and Air National Guards. I processed discharge paperwork until my contract expired on September 7, 2021, The following day, I began Army Basic Leader Course (BLC) to earn the rank of Sergeant. I graduated this course on September 30, 2021.

On October 5, 2021, I started working for Sahara Global Security as a supervisor. This company had just started, and within a few months I was Director of Operations.

On the evening of October 20, 2021, I witnessed the suicide of a fellow soldier who had been a close friend of mine for two years. It was a self-inflicted gunshot to the head, and alcohol was a factor. It happened at a house party during a National Guard weekend. Five soldier friends and a civilian were in close proximity and witnessed the suicide. The military and local law enforcement launched independent investigations. The law enforcement agency closed their investigation with no charges filed. The military investigation cleared everyone at the party, but took us off the roster for an upcoming overseas deployment to Iraq. We had been training for this deployment, and I had been looking forward to it. I lost my rank responsibility, and began to be viewed differently by my leadership.

I continued working at Sahara Global Security until March 25, 2022. On that day, I was informed by my Army leadership that myself and the other soldiers present at the house party were barred from all military property pending an investigation. I informed my supervisor at Sahara Global of this situation. He suspended myself and another employee who had also been at the house party.

On March 31, 2022, I was arrested and charged with making terroristic threats, and held at Franklin County Jail for three weeks until released on bond under house arrest. During my house arrest I stayed at my parents house, looked for work, and was able to work at a local sawmill after approval by the Franklin County court. I also attended virtual counseling with a counselor that specializes in military issues. (The Franklin County court had given me permission to travel

to Circleville while under house arrest for counseling sessions, but to lessen the concerns of aggrieved parties I chose to attend virtual counseling from my parent's home.)

On June 29, 2022, while reporting to my house arrest officer, I was arrested by agents with the ATF, and have been held at the Butler County jail since that time.

While in jail, I have been admitted to a program for incarcerated veterans which focuses on education and job training services and have completed a counseling course. I have been asked to work in the jail laundry and have done so seven days per week. I've been told the laundry facility has not looked so organized and clean in a very long time. I have also started to learn French as a way to spend some free time, and have recently helped an inmate who only speaks French to communicate with the staff. I have been sober since my first arrest, and have read an alcoholic anonymous booklet. Butler County Jail offers no formal AA programming, otherwise I would attend it.

I have had a lot of time to think about my current position in life, and regret many of my past decisions. I should have gone to college and participated in ROTC. I should have gone Active Duty. I shouldn't have drunk as much as I did and shouldn't have been so pessimistic about some of my military experiences.

I believe my drinking was the result of depression. After I came home from Afghanistan, I began to feel a sense of worthlessness. I felt as though my life had little to no meaning and nothing I did other than military service seemed to make a difference. I had gone from helping protect the lives of thousands of service members to sitting at home with nothing to do. I felt guilty for enjoying time with friends and family while other soldiers were still over there. I cursed at myself at times because I had turned down an offer to stay overseas for another nine months when it was time to leave. I yearned to go back. I saw my deployment to Afghanistan as the most impactful service I could perform. I had spent my childhood and teenage years hearing about that conflict and felt obligated to do my part.

I believe my depression and drinking worsened due to certain promotions within my unit. When unqualified personnel are promoted, bypassing qualified persons, when regulations are bypassed, when training requirements are lowered, and other favoritism is shown, it affects unit cohesiveness and morale. Trust in leadership ability is lost. I now realize these types of problems occur in organizations everywhere. If I'd had any self-respect, I'd have congratulated these people instead of allowing myself to be bitter of their success. But when higher ranking officers and fellow soldiers shared the same poor opinions with me regarding certain personnel, both verbally and in writing, I felt my opinions were justified and reasonable. I allowed my feelings to devolve into outright hatred. Because my peers voiced the same feelings, I was not encouraged to stop. Eventually, through months of heavy drinking, both alone and with those who shared the same feelings, I forgot the core reasons for my opinion. All that remained was the fact that in my mind, I didn't like these people, and neither did my friends.

I became disillusioned with the military, and this affected my everyday life. This cascaded into other problems. I failed to recognize my bitterness. I chose alcohol and group hatred as a coping mechanism. I was wrong to do this, but only saw things from one perspective.

Along with several like-minded soldier friends, I discovered a military counterculture on social media that consisted of extremely dark humor referencing war to help veterans cope with PTSD and not being deployed. It included things like committing war crimes, drinking on duty, gross negligence involving military weapons and equipment, drug use, and breaking Uniformed Code of Military Justice Regulations. It included memes and beliefs regarding doomsday preparation, government collapse, authoritarian rule and civil war. Events such as Waco, Ruby Ridge, and even Covid-19 were discussed. And specifically, memes were presented which supported the illegal manufacture and distribution of machine guns and National Firearm Act (NFA) items, and collecting military style gear for doomsday preparation.

My friends who had deployed with me discovered the same types of groups, and I felt I could relate with some of the ideas expressed on these pages. My bitterness toward the military made it easy for me to accept some of these ideas. I felt my depression had been slightly curbed by the humor I saw there.

I also discovered an online community of professional and amateur gunsmiths and 3D model design experts. I learned 3D printers had become widely available and affordable compared to recent years. I was fascinated by the technology. I've been a firearm enthusiast my entire life and wanted to learn about the engineering that went into modern firearm design. I saw this as an opportunity to test my skills, to learn more about the trade, and to have fun while being creative.

Computer aided design and a 3D printer allows one to make any object in one's mind a reality. Imagine for example wanting a personalized or custom vase, planter, or a decorative topographical model of a city, and have it in any size, color, and shape within hours, for pennies on the dollar. Firearm parts cost a fortune, and when I realized I could make them and save money while learning about two subjects of great interest to me, I took the opportunity.

What I chose to do next is what I regret the most of all my decisions. When I chose to manufacture autosears, all I could see in my shortsightedness was the novelty and fun I had with them. The dopamine release after shooting an automatic rifle for a firearm enthusiast is similar to flooring the gas pedal in a high-end sports car on the freeway. These actions offered a reprieve from my alcohol fueled depressive state. I was aware of the legal steps to take in order to manufacture and possess these devices, but I chose expedience, blind impulse, and short term gain over the proper steps one must take to have a career as a firearm manufacturer and licensed machine gun owner. It was a narrow and selfish decision. I was not aware of the implications of this decision nor the severity of the repercussions.

I should also address statements I've made online. In what I believe was a coping mechanism for my depression, I started discussing dark ideas and jokes with military friends in an online social

media platform that we thought was private. Unfortunately, our conversations spiraled out of control into an undeclared contest to see who could come up with the darkest or ugliest ideas. At no time did I ever intend on performing these disgusting ideas or sharing these thoughts with anyone other than the members of our private group. I never intended to put fear into the community. Now that our discussions have been made public, I realize the shock, fright, and pain it has caused others.

I don't want it to appear that I am blaming others for my actions. My decisions and actions were and continue to be wholly my own. I now recognize that through my actions, I've cast fear into the hearts and minds of people who trusted me with their lives. I belittled their beliefs and insulted their morals. Even if I didn't intend to, my actions caused it, and I am just as wrong as if I had meant for them to hear my hateful words. For this I am truly sorry.

I shouldn't have allowed myself to be influenced by gun memes and trends, and I shouldn't have acted on that influence. I wish I had listened to my sober cries for help, and spent my time trying to better myself instead of sharing racist and ugly memes with my friends and drinking myself into a stupor over things that don't matter.

I did not see the immediate repercussions of my actions. With my close friends being supportive of and encouraging my actions to violate the NFA and share extremely dark humor, I was not aware of the poor quality of my decisions until it was too late. I do not intend to associate with these people or counterculture post-sentence.

As a result of my decisions, I have lost a promising professional civilian career, the trust of my peers, superiors and acquaintances, my apartment, and many of my friends. My reputation is gone. The legacy of work and positive influence on others in my life is gone. My savings and assets will soon be gone. At Sahara Global Security, I destroyed a man's dream. I have tarnished my family's name, and deeply hurt those closest to me. I made my father embarrassed to approach former acquaintances in public. I've lost a military career. I spent my late childhood and teenage years bending the windmills of my imagination to make a military career a reality, to lose it has been soul-crushing and demoralizing beyond words.

To say that I'm sorry and regretful for my actions would be an understatement. I recognize the need to atone for my actions.

If possible, when sentenced to prison, I would like to learn about automotive repair, specifically diesel engines, earn an ASE certification, and possibly learn about collision repair and welding. And if possible, I plan to learn about and earn a degree in Business Management. I would like to attend a formal AA program, as well as continue counseling for mental health.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Thomas M. DeVelin